



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

TESTIMONY ON Sec. 12 of S.B. 786, AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION MANDATE RELIEF, TRANSPARENCY AND REGIONAL INCENTIVES

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As Superintendent of Norwich Public Schools, I thank you for the opportunity to comment on Governor's Bill No. 786. I would like to focus my comments on Section 12 of this bill which relates to towns relationships with endowed high schools or academies in our state.

The Norwich Public Schools send approximately 1500 students to Norwich Free Academy (NFA), an endowed public/private academy in Norwich. As an alumni myself and a former Board of Trustees Member, I know that NFA offers our students many wonderful educational and extracurricular opportunities on a beautiful campus in the heart of Norwich.

Our students attend NFA based on a tuition that we pay to NFA, depending on each student's educational needs. For the 2017-2018 school year, our regular education tuition costs are projected to be approximately \$16M for the 2017-2018 school year. Tuition costs for our students with disabilities will add approximately \$6m to this total.

We are charged additionally for our students that may require support services such as para educators (11 placed at NFA at this time), speech and language services, a liaison to attend meetings, occupational and physical therapy services and services for alternative educational programs. These are examples of our additional costs beyond tuitions. These costs generally add up to approximately \$2M over our overall tuition costs. This includes transportation for all Norwich students to NFA. Our total cost for our students to attend NFA for the 2017-2018 school year is projected to be approximately \$22M. This is anticipated to be 1/3 of our municipal budget allocation. 1/3 of our budget that is decided for us with no ability to equalize costs across the preK to 12 spectrum. That

means that any cuts or reductions in our programs due to budget constraints are limited to our preK to 8 program. This means that we are not able to spread these reductions equitably and they disproportionately impact our students when it would be easiest for us to fill in any gaps they have.

NFA has developed a 5 year contract with us that was not negotiated, it was determined. The first two years included a 2.5% increase to all partner districts. Year three will be the 2017-2018 school year and will also include a 2.5% increase. (They have factored in a \$200.00 discount per Norwich Student for the use of fire, police and emergency operations provided by our city.) The increase for the final two years of the contract is unknown and will be determined by NFA. This contract was developed and approved by NFA's Board of Trustees, a group of people that are selected to assume this decision making role.

The major concern and challenge is that no conversation or collaboration takes place to determine any of these costs. These costs translate into 1/3 of our general fund budget for all of our preK to 8 students.(Our municipal resources are very limited and each year the Board of Education eliminates programs and services for these students because of a lack of funding. Since NFA is able to send us a non negotiated tuition bill, the impact of their increases can only be assessed to the costs associated with our 3,600 Prek to 8 students, over 19.5% of whom have specialized needs.

Sec. 12 (b) of Governor's Bill 786 is asking that governing boards of endowed academies such as NFA have representation of local school districts on their Boards. The key to this would be open communication and collaboration for all partners in the work for all preK-12 students. This proposed change would bring public oversight to the budget process i.e. a published budget with hearings. These are public funds and should have public input/transparency.

We should not have to sacrifice the foundational years for our students without any collaboration, communication as partners in our important work with our students.

As you continue to address equity in school funding across the state, I thank you for considering the challenges faced by

Norwich as an urban center with many needs and an endowed academy as our designated high school.

Thank you for your time and support.